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THE LOGGIE OF RAPHAEL IN THE VATICAN.

By
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Bramante d'Urbino, the gifted originator of the first plan of S. Peter's, the builder of that most beautiful of all Rome's secular edifices, the Cancellaria, had also the construction of the Vatican entrusted to him, and among other things erected in the so-called Cortile di San Damaso are those elegant open arcades rising one above the other in four stories, with a straight entablature over the upper one. The vestibule of the third story, looking eastward, which is on the same floor as the world renowned chambers of the Vatican, was entrusted by Leo X. to Bramante's nephew Raphael, under whose direction was produced a decoration which must be called a masterpiece of its kind, uniting in itself every artistic experience of whole centuries, all breathing with wonderful life, the spirit and genius of Raphael.

In the style of these decorations three different periods are united: the first reaches back to the time of Cimabue (1240) but improved by the great Giotto and his pupils, and the perfect Renaissance ornamentations on roof and walls, with painted ornament, medallions and wreaths in fresco: then the plastic decorations emanating from Ghiberti, Brunellesco, Alberto and other founders of the Renaissance, who, besides making use of antique models, applied themselves diligently to a profound study of nature, and acquired a continually increasing delicacy of treatment during this whole period; and lastly, a short time before Raphael undertook the embellishment of the Loggie, there were discovered in the Baths of Titus the so-called grotesques, in which the antique decorative art revelled most fantastically, enlivening walls and vaulted roofs with frescoes and stuccoes of the most pleasing and delicate kind. Raphael and his assistants took immediate possession of these creations, which, rising from their graves, opened up an entirely new world of beauty, taking however no narrow or partial view of them, but introducing these essentially Italian acquisitions so powerfully

and in such due proportion into the decoration of their Loggie, that here again there arose something entirely new, namely, a work uniting in itself the excellencies of all these three different styles.

The grouping and arrangement of the Loggie are most simple and distinct. It is a plain pillar architecture opening outwardly in light arcades of round arches, with pilasters at the back of quiet aspect, between which are windows and doors bearing lightly and airily above them that series of semi-spherical vaults from whose summits smile down upon us the frescoes of Raphael. Most suitably adapted to these simple and grand forms are the decorations, in which there reigns the strictest subordination both to the architecture of the whole and the single pieces. And it was thus only that it became possible to give distinctness to the infinite richness of form and colours, and to ensure a due impression of the whole.

The flooring is laid with tiles of coloured terracotta of beautiful patterns; pillars and pilasters have stuccoed mouldings, and the principal panels painted; the ceilings are also beautifully stuccoed, framing those scriptural pictures which appear as if painted in canvas. There is an uninterrupted gradation from the flooring, starting from the geometrical pattern of the tiles of Robbia to the structural mouldings covered with delicate foliage, then spreading forth in arabesques and beautiful scrolls and tendrils to the pillars and pilasters, and even extending to the vaulted roof in most rich alternations, with little fresco-pictures and coloured stucco ornaments, which, in almost superabundant life, form the framework to those simple but noble and grand pictures of sacred subjects. Then there is also the free outlook upon that landscape which fills the heart with unspeakable ecstasy, the play of the sunlight and the pure blue sky of Rome. It is to be regretted that in order to protect these frescoes, it has of late been found necessary to provide the

gallery with windows, for it is indispensable for a full and decidedly harmonious impression of a space so varicoloured and almost overcrowded with figures as the Loggie, that it should stand open to the sky and be viewed in combination with the wondrously beautiful landscape without.

Let us now descend into particulars.

The grand reason why, notwithstanding the infinite details, the impression is never confused, but clear, most pleasing, and in due proportion, is to be found first of all in the relative diminutiveness of the several ornamental pieces, whence the effect of the whole comes out more strongly, as no single piece is of sufficient importance to attract and rivet the eye. The several surfaces appear rather as if covered with lively carpetry or shaded by a variegated veil; only from time to time do large ornamental forms occur, as beautiful flowerwreaths or fantastic fruit garlands, to contrast with the more quiet devices. This effect produced by small patterns was practised in ancient times, continued through the whole mediæval period both in the East and West, but it was reserved for our times, through deviating from this system, to spoil the venerable and noble effect of many old buildings, and to destroy their harmony and proportions.

A great effect is also produced in the Loggie by the first view of the simple but grand architectonic treatment, over which is shed an enchanting and harmonious play of colour which captivates the soul in a dream like manner: on a nearer view however there are disclosed most beautiful ornaments applied to the walls in sportive elegance and often in the boldest wantonness, every one of which is of importance by its own intrinsic beauty: while above on the ceilings this movement rises to its highest point by an abundance of figures rivalling one another, and concentrating themselves round the inserted tablets and historical pictures. But it is impossible to describe the richness of even one single arcade, with whose motives the most spacious hall could be easily and most variously decorated. In the spaces between the pilasters, for example, are seen ancient Gods and Goddesses, Nymphs, Satyrs, Genii, fabulous Animals, landscapes, delicate relief sculptures like cameos, ornaments in architecture, plants and vessels crowded together with the most admirable skill in an agreeable and most effective ensemble, and executed with the assistance of the most varied arts. Still more animated is the treatment of the spherical vaults, which afford still more scope for fancy, and from which look down in quiet magnificence and striking simplicity those biblical scenes which Raphael designed and his pupils executed, and which have so continually become the cynosure of the whole building that they have long become the common possession of Christendom, and even their reproduction in the most insignificant wood cuts retains something of their original charm.

As in every work of art which a great genius has produced, concentrating in himself the powers of many centuries, fresh marvels of beauty disclose themselves on every fresh contemplation of it, so in these Loggie the more frequently we visit them, we find in them new

charms which had formerly escaped our notice. They are, it may almost be said, as rich as Nature itself. But such a work could only have emanated from a time when art had been flourishing and continually progressing for many centuries, and had heaped up a quantity of the very best motives, while at the same time there had grown up a generation of experienced artists possessing the most delicate sense both of composition and execution; and even then, over and above all this combination, some great genius must keep watch and ward, overlooking, combining, explaining everything, so that a work may be produced, concerning which posterity could never comprehend how it could have been the result of so short a time and so few collaborators.

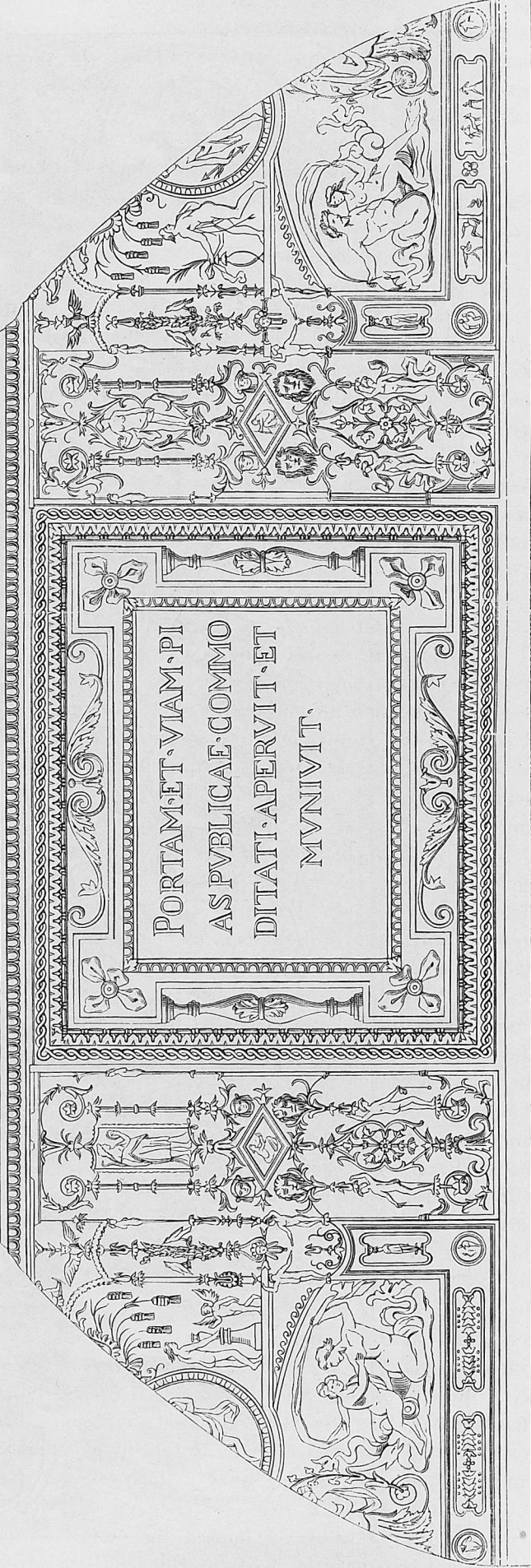
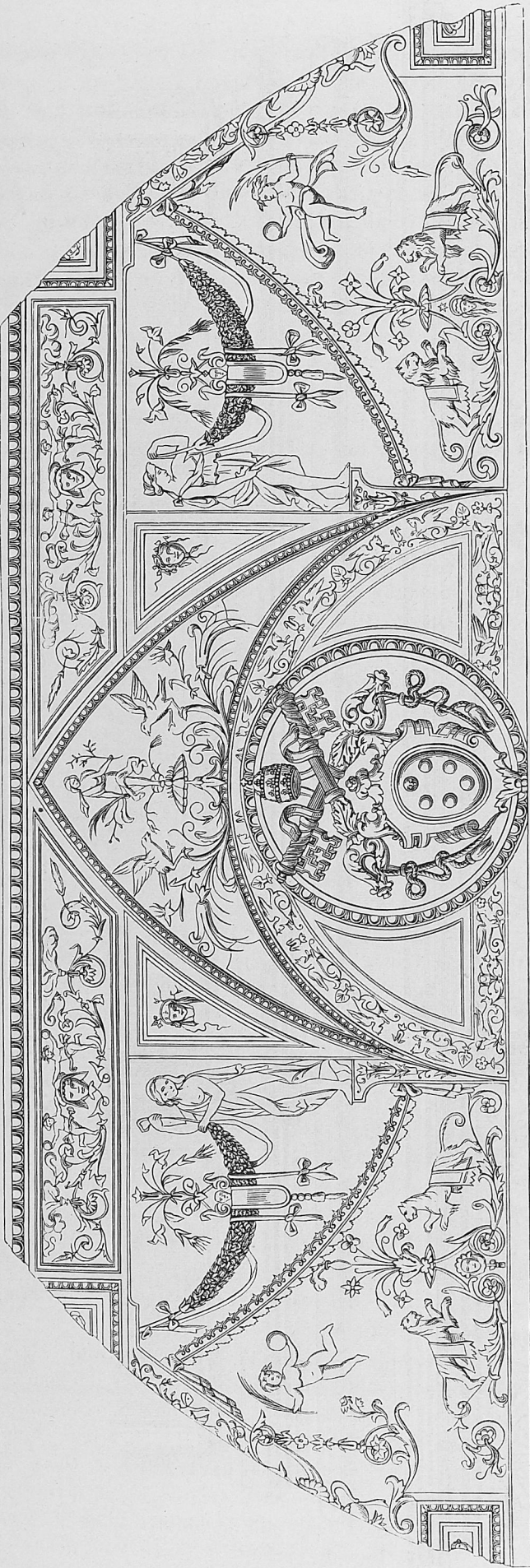
The Loggie have sometimes been copied: once in the year 1550 for a member of the Fugger firm in Antwerp, and again for Spain, in which copy even the glazed tiles for the flooring were very rightly not overlooked as essential to the general effect.

If an immediate reproduction of the decorations of the Loggie is a difficult undertaking, the difficulty is still more increased if it is Raphael's style which is sought to be imitated; for the transition from the sublime to the ridiculous is seldom so easy as in a decoration whose effect depends on such innumerable motives.

One word more concerning the technic. Most of the stuccoed parts are kept as quiet as possible, as for example, the leaf-adorned cornices which surround the pilasters with the effect of a fringe: they are impressed, as may clearly be seen at the corners, by metal patterns. When need requires, which very seldom occurs, there appears a raised ornament in stucco. Frescoes and stucco-works are certainly, as indeed the technic requires, applied at first hand, according to the suggestion of the moment, and this imparts to them their wonderful life and gracefulness. Following the antique process a fine marble dust is mixed with the stucco. We must not forget to mention also the splendid framework of the doors, and the beautifully carved oakdoors, the latter by the celebrated master of his art, Antonio Barili.

The following artists are also named by Giorgio Besari as having been employed upon the Loggie of Raphael: the stucco-work was executed by Giovanni de Udine. In the painting, Giulio Romano was employed, who however had but a small share in it; also Francesco Penni, Bartolomeo Ramenghi, Perin del Vaga, Pellegrino da Modena, Caravaggio and others. The coloured and glazed tiles for the flooring came from the workshops of Robbia in Florence.

Once only was the perfect beauty and delicacy of the Loggie rivalled; namely, in the Villa Madama at the descent of Monte Mario at Rome now lying half in ruins. This was also commenced by Raphael and completed by his pupils. One of the most gifted of these, Giulio Romano, then transplanted this style of decoration to Mantua, where it may still be admired in great extension and beauty, though perhaps without that delicacy and elegance of design and colour which distinguishes the Court of the Loggie.



Ornaments of the Loggie of Raphael in the Vatican.